

CIA Director to Leave Post

Webster's four years praised by Bush; no replacement named

By Saul Friedman

WASHINGTON BUREAU

Washington — President George Bush yesterday announced the retirement of CIA Director William Webster, who brought the agency out of the woods of scandal.

Initial speculation on a successor turned toward two old CIA friends of the president — James R. Lilley, a longtime intelligence official in the Far East who is leaving his post as ambassador to China, and Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates, the former number two executive at the agency.

Bush, a former CIA chief who served with both men, announced Webster's retirement, although no date has been set for his departure, and the president effusively praised the former federal judge and FBI director from Missouri for demonstrating "the value of an intelligence organization that is professionally directed."

Bush noted that Webster remained faithful to presidential instructions to keep the CIA out of policy battles by "providing intelligence to the policymakers of this government" rather than using intelligence to shape policy.

Webster, 67, who had spent nine years as head of the FBI, was appointed by President Ronald Reagan as central intelligence director in 1987 to succeed William Casey, who lay dying of brain cancer. The White House, the National Security Council and the CIA were besieged by charges that Casey was the mastermind of a scheme to sell arms to Iran in exchange for hostages and convert the proceeds to illegally finance the Nicaraguan contras.

The echoes of the Iran-contra scandal and Bush's insistence that the CIA stay out of policy infighting are expected to be among the issues as the president chooses a successor. In his news conference, Bush did not give a timetable for announcing a new CIA director.

Bush said he has not yet considered a replacement for Webster, but when a reporter suggested the possibility of Gates, the president replied that he is "a worthy man . . . We all have great respect for him."

Gates, then deputy CIA director, had been Reagan's first choice in 1987 to replace Casey, but his appointment was killed by the scandal. Considered a top intelligence professional, Gates had spent more than 20 years in the agency and had widespread support in the Senate but was nevertheless forced to withdraw his name when it was charged that he had known about the arms-for-hostages scheme but failed to notify congressional oversight committees of the agency's questionable activities.

Sen. William Cohen (R-Maine), vice-chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he would "recommend someone like Bob Gates." And Cohen speculated that Gates could now be confirmed because the scandal has died.

But other sources on the Senate and House intelli-

gence panels, who asked to remain anonymous, said they doubted that Bush, who has had difficulty explaining his own involvement and conduct in the Iran-contra affair, would want to reopen old wounds in the course of probing confirmation hearings.

In addition, as deputy national security adviser, Gates has gained a reputation for political infighting

and he has had some public differences with Secretary of State James A. Baker over policies toward the Soviet Union and the intentions of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

As a result, congressional sources suggested that Bush's favorite might be Lilley, who was born in China, the son of an American oilman and graduated from Yale, the president's alma mater, before beginning a long career as an intelligence official and diplomat.

Lilley served as CIA station chief in China when Bush headed the U.S. liaison office there in 1974-77 and the two men have been close ever since. At Bush's suggestion, Reagan named Lilley ambassador to South Korea in 1986. Appointed by Bush as ambassador to China in February, 1989, Lilley played a key advisory role in the administration after the Chinese cracked down on the democratic student movement in June, 1989.

Lilley is leaving his post Friday and, according to an administration official, he has made it clear to Bush that he wanted a new assignment.

Others who are frequently mentioned as possible successors to Webster include National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, who once indicated he was interested in running the CIA, and Bobby Ray Ingram, former deputy director of the CIA, who is a consultant

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Date **9 MAY 1991**